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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

28 September 1956

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 78-56

SUBJECT: DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

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1. After reviewing the situation in the Union of South Africa in the light of developments over the past few years, the staff feels that the conclusions of NIE-72 ("Probable Developments in the Union of South Africa," published 20 October 1952) remain basically sound. If the need were to arise in the near future for a South African estimate, it would, in our judgment, parallel in general the findings of NIE-72. In this memorandum we wish to point out some places where NIE-72 would need revision.

2. Trends in Party Strength. As forecast in NIE-72, after winning the 1953 election, the Nationalists took steps to place the supremacy of Parliament beyond constitutional checks and otherwise to increase their domination of South African politics and government. They "packed" the Supreme Court, and enlarged the membership of the Senate from 48 to 89 in order to have a two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament. These steps paved the way for constitutional amendments and legislation designed to strengthen their political

1/ This memorandum has been coordinated with O/CI at the working level.
 2/ Party strengths in Parliament (July 1956):

	House of Assembly	Senate
Nationalist	94	77
United	51	8
National Conservative	6	0
Labor	5	0
Representatives of Natives	3	4
Liberal	0	0
Union Federal	0	0

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position and to advance their racialist and discriminatory policies. The Nationalists are well-disciplined, at least in Parliament; their strength and solidarity appear to have been fully maintained in Parliamentary sessions since 1953. The United Party opposition, on the other hand, continues to be hampered by ineffective leadership, a conflict between its liberal and conservative factions, and inability to create an alternative program to that of the Nationalist government. The prospects for the smaller parties -- Liberal and Labor, which oppose racialist policies, and National Conservative and Federal, which are splinter groups from the two main parties -- continue to be very dim. The strength of the Nationalists, the weakness of the "dis-United Party," and the inability of the four small parties to enhance their mass appeal indicate that the Nationalists will go on to win the next general election (scheduled for 1958) and probably remain in power for another five years thereafter.

3. Race Relations. Relations between the dominant white minority of three million and the eleven million Natives, Coloreds, and Asiatics, have continued to deteriorate. In the last Parliamentary session the Nationalists were almost obsessed with racial matters, and a very large percentage of the bills enacted were directed against the non-Europeans. Nationalist policies have increased the resentment of the non-Europeans, and in particular the Coloreds, who were placed on a separate electoral roll and lost the right to sit on the Cape Provincial Council. Formerly friendly toward the Europeans, or at least far less hostile than the Natives and Asiatics, the Coloreds are apparently now convinced that their future lies with the non-Europeans. The leadership of the latter has become more bitter than ever, and we still believe, as NIE-72 pointed out, that increasing racial tension should expand the opportunities for Communist exploitation, although Communist influence remains insignificant thus far.

4. Despite the professed Nationalist "ideal" of complete territorial separation of whites and non-Europeans (apartheid), the government's policies have been limited to maintenance of white supremacy, repressive educational and trade union measures against the non-Europeans, and social and residential segregation in those European rural and urban areas where Natives, Coloreds and Asiatics are employed. The Nationalist politicians, as opposed to certain clerical and academic theorists, realize that the South African economy is based on non-European

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labor and will require increasingly larger numbers of skilled natives for continued development. Moreover, some Afrikaner as well as English-speaking businessmen are now pressing the government not to disturb the economic framework by any foolhardy venture of enclosing all Natives in reserves. While the Nationalist government has undertaken some measures to improve the Natives' lot, both in the reserves and in white urban and rural areas where Natives are employed, the prospects are that white supremacy and the need for Native labor will continue to guide the Nationalists' policies, with improvement of the Natives' situation only a minor consideration. A trend toward more moderate thinking within the Dutch Reformed Church has resulted in renunciation of the alleged scriptural basis for apartheid, but neither the Dutch Church nor the few liberal Nationalists in the universities are likely to challenge the principle of white domination in the foreseeable future.

5. Foreign Relations. NIE-72 still adequately reflects the strategic importance of the Union to the West. Internal tensions have not affected the flow of strategic materials to the US and UK, although we continue to believe that in the long run shipment of these materials will be hampered or even halted when the struggle over white supremacy erupts into widespread disorders. The Suez crisis may make the Union's bases and port facilities extremely valuable even short of general war, if ships normally using the Canal should be forced to go around the Cape. NIE-72 has proven correct in stating that for at least four years the Union would probably remain unable to meet its commitment to provide a full armored division for Middle East defense within three months after the outbreak of war. The Union's military forces are still capable only of maintaining internal security, and there is no indication that the country will be prepared to meet its commitment in the foreseeable future.

6. Some of the NIE-72 forecasts regarding the Union's probable foreign policies, particularly those concerning Africa, will require revision in a new estimate. The repression of non-Europeans in the Union has increased racial animosities elsewhere in Africa, and relations between the Nationalists and Tropical African native leaders are poor. However, the prospective emergence of independent Black states, such as the Gold Coast, Egypt's efforts to penetrate South of the Sahara, and the Union's fear of Communism have moved some Nationalist leaders to express interest in improving relations with other areas of Africa. On the other hand, because of public opinion, especially that of its Nationalist

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supporters, the Union government will be forced to go slow in any efforts to establish better relations with Black leaders and to negotiate common defense arrangements against Communism. But the Nationalists will probably attempt to bring about some improvement in their relations with Black Africa over the next several years, although their repressive policies toward non-Europeans in the Union are not likely to be seriously altered in order to realize this objective.

7. NIE-72 will also have to be revised regarding the Nationalists' "hope within perhaps a generation to absorb the Rhodesias." The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was created after the publication of NIE-72, and the Nationalists have probably abandoned their former aim of extending their rule to the Rhodesias. On the other hand, the Afrikaners maintain their claim to the protectorates of Basutoland, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland in the face of continued British refusal to cede those territories.

8. Despite the tendency of many Nationalists to isolationism, as stated in NIE-72, "South Africa's desire for US-UK markets and capital, its need for allies, and its fear of Communism will lead the government to continue to cooperate with the Western powers." Relations between the US and the Union continue to be good, and the US enjoys great prestige in South Africa despite differences over the Nationalists' racial policies. Although the Afrikaners delight in twisting the lion's tail by proclaiming their intention to establish a republic, relations between the UK and the Union are also good, particularly in the fields of economics and defense. As a result of South Africa's traditional antipathy to the English, and its sensitivity to UN criticism -- which has led the Afrikaners to adopt a general position against interference in the domestic affairs of other countries -- a Union spokesman has asserted that the nationalization of the Suez Canal was "Egypt's domestic affair." Nevertheless, despite these and other irritants, NIE-72 appears to have exaggerated the probability that South Africa will "in time" replace the Commonwealth tie by a bilateral relationship with the UK. Although the Nationalists intend to proclaim a republic at an appropriate time, there is no evidence that emotional considerations will overcome their realization of the benefits derived from the Commonwealth association. Economic and defense advantages, fear of Communism and of Egypt, and their desire to establish better relations with the rest of Africa will probably lead the Nationalists to remain in the Commonwealth -- even should the Gold Coast and other Black states become members.

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9. Possibility of Civil War. NIE-72 is most obviously dated and invalid regarding its estimates of the role of the Torch Commandos and of the possibility of civil war. The opposition United Party organized the Torch Commandos in 1950 as a device to arouse and exploit alarm over the alleged Nationalist Party threat to constitutional democracy. NIE-72 said: "If the Nationalists should win the 1953 election, and if they should then take steps further to entrench themselves in power, the danger of armed reaction by the Torch Commandos would be great." The estimate qualified this danger by asserting that the leaders of both parties and influential business interests would exert themselves to avert civil war. Although the Nationalists won the elections in 1953 and took steps further to entrench themselves in power, there was no need for Afrikaner and English leaders to restrain the Torch Commandos. Rather than take to the streets, the Torch Commandos took to the soccer fields — and have ever since concentrated on their personal lives and fortunes, rather than on politics. There is less friction today between the Afrikaners and English than at any time in recent years.

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